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Survey: Religiously, Congress doesn't reflect America



Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., speaks during a Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs committee hearing to examine social media's impact on homeland security, Sept. 14, 2022, on Capitol Hill in Washington.

By PETER SMITH
Associated Press

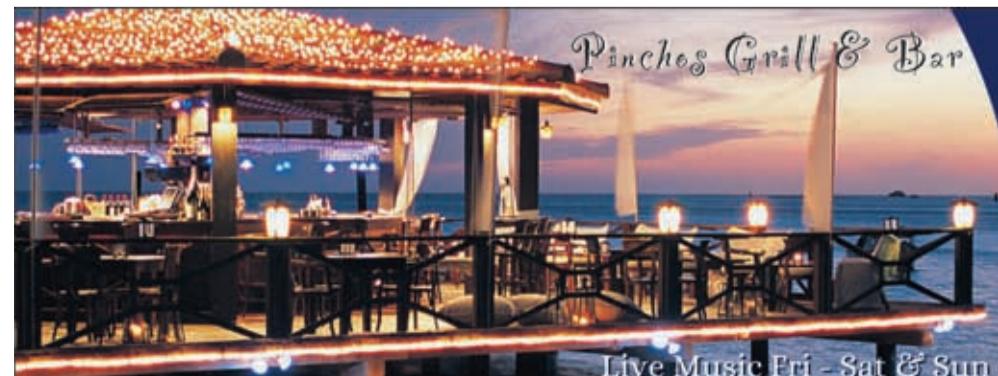
Religiously speaking, the incoming 118th Congress looks like America — that is, the America of decades past, rather than today. Congress is far more Christian, and religious overall, than today's general population. Even though nearly three in 10 Americans claim no religious affiliation — a rate that has steadily risen in recent years — only two of the 534 incoming members of Congress publicly identify as such.

Those are among the conclusions of an analysis by Pew Research Center of the 118th Congress, which was expected to start this week pending a House leadership vote.

The Congress "remains largely untouched by two trends that have long marked religious life in the United States: a decades-long decline in the share of Americans who identify as Christian, and a corresponding

increase in the percentage who say they have no religious affiliation," said the Pew report, released Tuesday. It was based on a CQ Roll Call survey of members of Congress. Nearly 88% of members of Congress identify as Christian, compared with only 63% of U.S. adults overall. That includes 57% of congresspersons who identify as Protestant and 28% as Catholic, both higher than national rates. Also, 6% of members of Congress identify as Jewish, compared with 2% of the overall population. While 29% Americans claim no religious affiliation, they'd have to squint to see themselves reflected in Congress. The only overtly non-religious members are U.S. Rep. Jared Huffman, D-Calif., who identifies as humanist, and Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, independent of Arizona, who says she's religiously unaffiliated.

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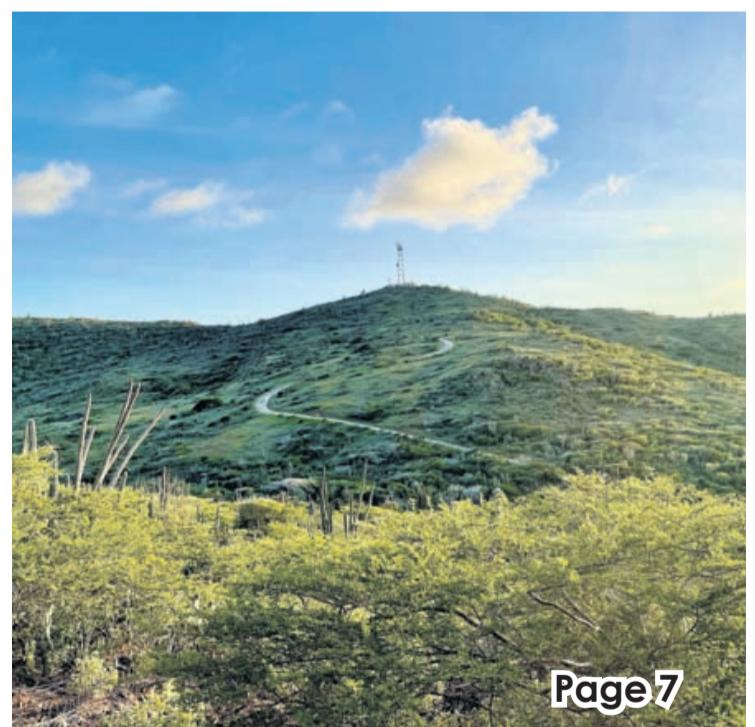
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Aruba movie, Blackout winner at NIIFF 2022

Aruba's nature is a winner!



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Survey: Religiously, Congress doesn't reflect America

Continued from Front

Pew listed 20 other members of Congress as having unknown religious affiliations, either because they declined to answer CQ Roll Call's query or because the answers are otherwise muddled (such as in the case of New York Republican George Santos, along with much else in his background). Historically, lacking a religious identity was seen as a political liability. Only 60% of Americans told a Gallup survey in 2019 that they'd be willing to vote for an atheist — fewer than would vote for gays or lesbians or various religious or ethnic groups.

But Huffman said he experienced no political blowback. "If anything, there's a political upside," he said. "People appreciate the fact that I'm just being honest." He said many colleagues in Congress find religion to be politically useful, "particularly across the aisle, how so many of them exploit and weaponize religion but seem to be totally divorced from any authentic connection to the religion they're weaponizing." The ranks of Christians in Congress has dipped only slightly over the decades, though it's a different story with the general population. Since 2007, Christians have gone from 78% to 63%



"In God We Trust" is engraved in stone above a U.S. flag in the House of Representatives chamber at the Capitol in Washington on Tuesday, March 1, 2022.

Associated Press

of the population, while the non-affiliated rose from 16% to 29%, according to Pew.

The trend line is even more dramatic when looking back to 1990, when nearly nine in 10 Americans identified as Christian, while less than one in 10 identified as non-religious, according to researchers at Trinity College in Connecticut.

In some ways, the two political parties conform to perception.

The Republican congressional delegation is a staggering 99% Christian, with the rest Jewish or unknown. Republicans — who have long embraced Christian expressions in their political functions and where an aggressive form of Christian nationalism has become more mainstream — include 69% Protestants,

25% Catholics and 5% other Christians (such as Mormon and Orthodox).

Democrats have more religious diversity, at about 76% Christian (including 44% Protestant, 31% Catholic and 1.5% Orthodox) and 12% Jewish. They have about 1% each of Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and Unitarian Universalist representation. But Democrats' paucity of openly non-affiliated members contrasts starkly with a constituency to which it owes much.

Religiously unaffiliated voters opted overwhelmingly for Democrats candidates in the 2022 midterms. They voted for Democrats over Republicans by more than a 2 to 1 margin in House races, according to AP VoteCast, an expansive survey of more than 94,000

voters nationwide. And in some bellwether races, the unaffiliated went as high as 4 to 1 for Democrats.

"The fact that the (Democratic) leadership doesn't reflect an open, secular identity is paradoxical, but I think it's the nature of realpolitik," said Phil Zuckerman, professor of sociology and secular studies at Pitzer College in Claremont, California. He said Democrats know that non-religious voters align with them on the issues, but party leaders also don't want to alienate other, more religious parts of the party's base, particularly Black Protestants.

Party leaders "speak to the politics of secular people but don't want to take on the identity," he said.

Zuckerman added that conservative Christians face the "branding problem" similar to what atheists once faced. Many voters, he said, have reacted against Christian nationalism, and young voters in particular are alienated by conservative Christian stances against LGBTQ people, while many voters of all ages have reacted against Christian nationalism.

He cited a prominent incident in 2020 when authorities forcibly cleared Black Lives Matter protesters in Lafayette Park in Washington, after which President

Donald Trump walked to a nearby church and held up a Bible. "When Trump held up that Bible in front of that church in D.C., he did more damage to the Christian brand than Hitchens and Dawkins and Harris combined," Zuckerman said, referring to popular atheist authors.

In 2018, Huffman helped found the Congressional Freethought Caucus. It had a roster of about 15 members in the previous Congress. "It's people of different religious perspectives, but what brings us together is a common belief that there should be a bright line of separation between church and state and that we should make public policy based on facts and reason and science, and not religion," he said. He predicted that in time, more members of Congress would identify with secular values.

"It's going to be a trailing reflection of this change that has been happening for a couple of decades now," he said. "It takes a while for politicians to figure out that it's OK to do things like this."

The Pew report analyzed one short of Congress' capacity of 535 because one member, Rep. A. Donald McEachin, D-Va., died in November after being re-elected. □

Twitter says it will relax ban on political advertising



This July 9, 2019, file photo shows a sign outside of the Twitter office building in San Francisco.

Associated Press

By The Associated Press

Twitter says it will ease up on its 3-year-old ban on political advertising, the latest

The company tweeted late Tuesday that "we're relaxing our ads policy for cause-based ads in the US." "We also plan to expand the political advertising we permit in the coming weeks," the company said from its Twitter Safety account.

Twitter banned all political advertising in 2019, reacting to growing concern about misinformation spreading on social media.

At the time, then-CEO Jack Dorsey said that while internet ads are powerful and effective for commercial advertisers, "that power brings significant risks to politics, where it can be

used to influence votes to affect the lives of millions." The latest move appears to represent a break from that policy, which had banned ads by candidates, political parties, or elected or appointed government officials.

Political advertising made up a sliver of Twitter's overall revenue, accounting for less than \$3 million of total spending for the 2018 U.S. midterm election.

In reversing the ban, Twitter said that "cause-based advertising can facilitate public conversation around important topics" and that the change will align the platform's advertising policy

with those of "TV and other media outlets," without providing further details.

Facebook in March 2021 lifted its ban on political and social issue ads that was put in place after the 2020 U.S. presidential election.

Musk bills himself as a free-speech warrior and bought Twitter because he apparently believed it wasn't living up to its potential as a free speech platform.

But the billionaire Tesla CEO has been forced to make huge cost cuts and scramble to find more sources of revenue to justify the \$44 billion purchase. □

McCarthy fails again in bid for speaker, GOP in disarray

By LISA MASCARO, FARNOUSH AMIRI and KEVIN FREKING

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) —

House Republicans flailed through a second day of multiple balloting Wednesday, unable to elect Rep. Kevin McCarthy as House speaker or to come up with a new strategy to end the political chaos that has tarnished the start of their new majority.

For a fifth time, Republicans tried to vote McCarthy into the top job as the House plunged deeper into disarray. That came moments after the fourth vote showed 20 conservative holdouts still refusing to support him, unchanged from the previous time around and leaving him far short of the 218 votes typically needed to win the gavel.

"Let cooler, more rational heads prevail," said Rep. Warren Davidson, R-Ohio, a conservative aligned with the far-right Freedom Caucus who nevertheless nominated McCarthy.

Rep. Lauren Boebert, a firm Colorado conservative, nominated Rep. Byron Donalds, R-Fla., the chosen protest candidate of the day and called for former President Donald Trump, the conservatives' hero, to tell McCarthy, "Sir, you do not have the votes and it's time to withdraw."

Earlier Wednesday, Trump had done the opposite, urging Republicans to vote for McCarthy. "Close the deal, take the victory, he wrote on his social media site, using all capital letters. "Do not turn a great



Rep. Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., listens to votes being cast in the House chamber as the House meets for a second day to elect a speaker and convene the 118th Congress in Washington, Wednesday, Jan. 4, 2023.

Associated Press

triumph into a giant & embarrassing defeat."

Yet the California Republican vowed to keep fighting despite losing in multiple rounds of voting that threw the new majority into tumult a day earlier. Animated private discussions broke out on the chamber floor between McCarthy supporters and detractors searching for an endgame. The House gaveted in at noon, but no other work could be done swearing in new members, forming committees, tackling legislation, investigating the Biden administration until the speaker was elected. "Sure, it looks messy," said Rep. Mike Gallagher, R-Wis., a McCarthy ally who quickly re-nominated him for the job with a rousing speech designed to peel off detractors. But democ-

racy is messy, he said. "The American people are in charge."

McCarthy himself entered the chamber saying, "We'll have another vote." But the dynamic proved no different from Day One, as Democrats re-upped their leader, Rep. Hakeem Jeffries, for speaker, and a right-flank leader from the Freedom Caucus twice offered a challenge to McCarthy nominating Donalds in another history making moment. Both Jeffries and Donalds are Black.

"This country needs leadership," said Rep. Chip Roy, the Texas Republican noting the first time in history two Black Americans were nominated for the high office, and lawmakers from both parties rose to applaud.

It was the first time in 100

years that a nominee for House speaker could not take the gavel on the first vote, but McCarthy appeared undeterred. Instead, he vowed to fight to the finish.

The disorganized start to the new Congress pointed to difficulties ahead with Republicans now in control of the House.

"I just think it's really embarrassing it's taking so long," Biden said. "I have no idea" who will prevail.

Tensions flared among the new House majority as their campaign promises stalled out. Not since 1923 has a speaker's election gone to multiple ballots, and the longest and most grueling fight for the gavel started in late 1855 and dragged out for two months, with 133 ballots, during debates over slavery in the run-up to

the Civil War.

A new generation of conservative Republicans, many aligned with Trump's Make America Great Again agenda, want to upend business as usual in Washington, and were committed to stopping McCarthy's rise without concessions to their priorities.

"Kevin McCarthy is not going to be a speaker," declared Rep. Bob Good, R-Va., one of the holdouts.

As the spectacle of voting dragged on, McCarthy's backers implored the holdouts to fall in line for the California Republican.

"We all came here to get things done," the second-ranking Republican, Rep. Steve Scalise, said in a Tuesday speech nominating McCarthy for the vote and urging his colleagues to drop their protest.

Railing against Democratic President Joe Biden's agenda, Scalise, himself a possible GOP compromise choice, said, "We can't start fixing those problems until we elect Kevin McCarthy our next speaker."

The standoff over McCarthy has been building since Republicans won the House majority in the mid-term elections. While the Senate remains in Democratic hands, barely, House Republicans are eager to confront Biden after two years of the Democrats controlling both houses of Congress. The conservative Freedom Caucus led the opposition to McCarthy, believing he's neither conservative enough nor tough enough to battle Democrats. □

Rats! NYC mayor ticketed for rodents at his property again

NEW YORK (AP) — New York City Mayor Eric Adams vowed Wednesday to fight his own City Hall again after he was ticketed for rats at his Brooklyn townhouse.

A city health department inspector had issued two new summonses last month, just one day after the Democratic mayor ap-

peared remotely before a hearing officer on Dec. 6 to get a \$300 summons for rats at his property dismissed.

"A rat burrow was observed along the ledge of the fenceline at front right," the inspector wrote.

"Fresh rat droppings were observed in front of the garbage bins in the yard

at front right."

Not true, Adams insisted. "I have a camera at the house, and I looked back on that date," he said. "My yard is clean. My garbage is in containers. I go there, I sweep up. My place is clean."

An administrative hearing on the new summonses is scheduled for

Jan. 12, and Adams said he would plead his case once again. "I encourage any New Yorker: You get a summons, you feel it was done unjustly, go and fight it," Adams said. "And that's what I'm going to do. I'm going to follow the process."

Adams was asked about rats at an unrelated news

conference after the Daily News reported the latest violations. The mayor, who had made rat eradication a key policy goal for the city, said he is equally committed to ridding his own house of the pests.

"I spent \$7,000 to do rat mitigation," he said. "You have to be really scared of rats to spend \$7,000." □

College scam mastermind Rick Singer gets 3.5 years in prison

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER
Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — The mastermind of the nationwide college admissions bribery scheme that ensnared celebrities, prominent businesspeople and other parents who used their wealth and privilege to buy their kids' way into top-tier schools was sentenced to 3 1/2 years in prison Wednesday.

The punishment for Rick Singer, 62, is the longest sentence handed down in the sprawling scandal that embarrassed some of the nation's most prestigious universities and put a spotlight on the secretive admissions system already seen as rigged in favor of the rich.

Prosecutors had sought six years behind bars, noting Singer's extensive cooperation that helped authorities unravel the entire scheme. Singer began secretly working with investigators in 2018 and recorded hundreds of phone calls and meetings that helped authorities build the case against dozens of parents, athletic coaches and others arrested in March 2019. Those sent to prison for participating in the scheme include "Full House" actor



William "Rick" Singer founder of the Edge College & Career Network, departs federal court in Boston, on March 12, 2019.

Lori Loughlin, her fashion designer husband Mossimo Giannulli, and "Desperate Housewives" star Felicity Huffman. Coaches from schools including Yale, Stanford, Georgetown University and the University of California, Los Angeles, admitted to accepting bribes. "It was a scheme that was breathtaking in its scale and its audacity. It has literally become the stuff of books and made-for-TV

movies," Assistant U.S. Attorney Stephen Frank told the judge Wednesday. The prosecutor called Singer's cooperation in the case "unparalleled" but said it was also problematic, noting that Singer admitted to obstructing the investigation by tipping off several of his clients who were under government scrutiny.

Defense attorney Candice Fields said Singer took

great personal risk by wearing a wire to record meetings and "did whatever was necessary" to assist the government in its investigation. Fields had requested three years of probation, or if the judge deemed prison time necessary, six months behind bars. Singer apologized to his family, the schools he embarrassed in the public eye and others. He also promised to work every day of

Associated Press

his life going forward to make a positive impact in people's lives.

"My moral compass was warped by the lessons my father taught me about competition. I embraced his belief that embellishing or even lying to win was acceptable as long as there was victory. I should have known better," he said.

Singer pleaded guilty in 2019 on the same day the massive case became public to charges including racketeering conspiracy and money laundering conspiracy. Dozens of others ultimately pleaded guilty to charges, while two parents were convicted at trial.

Authorities in Boston began investigating the scheme after an executive under scrutiny for an unrelated securities fraud scheme told investigators that a Yale soccer coach had offered to help his daughter get into the school in exchange for cash.

For years, Singer paid off entrance exam administrators or proctors to inflate students' test scores and bribed coaches to designate applicants as recruits in order to boost their chances of getting into the school. □

Daughter of former U.S. intelligence director guilty of murder

ROCKVILLE, Md. (AP) — The daughter of former U.S. intelligence director John Negroponte has been found guilty of fatally stabbing a 24-year-old man

after a drunken argument inside a Maryland home. A Montgomery County jury on Tuesday convicted Sophia Negroponte, 29, of second-degree murder in

the February 2020 death of Yousuf Rasmussen, news outlets reported. She faces up to 40 years in prison at sentencing on March 31. Sophia Negroponte was one of five abandoned or orphaned Honduran children that John Negroponte and his wife adopted after Negroponte was appointed as U.S. ambassador to the Central American country in the 1980s, according to The Washington Post.

Sophia Negroponte and Rasmussen attended the same Washington high school and had been drinking, along with another person, on the night Rasmussen was killed, Montgomery County State's Attorney John McCarthy

said. They argued twice that night and Rasmussen left. When Rasmussen returned to get his cellphone, Negroponte "stabbed him multiple times, one being a death blow that severed his jugular," McCarthy said. Defense attorney David Moyse had urged jurors to consider that Sophia Negroponte was so intoxicated that night that she couldn't form specific intent.

"Alcohol pervades this case from the start; it pervades her life," he said, adding, "and it is absolutely at the heart of what happened there that night. And it's one of the major reasons that this is absolutely not a murder."

Jurors did not find Negro-

ponte guilty of the most serious charge she faced, first-degree, premeditated murder, according to the Post.

But they convicted her of second-degree murder, finding that she intended "to inflict such serious bodily harm" to Rasmussen "that death would be the likely result."

Montgomery County Circuit Court Judge Terrence J. McGann ordered her bond revoked, noting that Rasmussen was "taken from this earth, at a very young age with his whole life ahead of him, in such a horrific way."

After the verdict, John Negroponte, 83, said his family will discuss a possible appeal with their attorneys. □



This photo provided by the Montgomery County Police Dept. shows Sophia Negroponte.

Associated Press

U.S. reopening visa and consular services at embassy in Cuba

By MEGAN JANETSKY Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — The United States Embassy in Cuba is reopening visa and consular services Wednesday, the first time it has done so since a spate of unexplained health incidents among diplomatic staff in 2017 slashed the American presence in Havana.

The Embassy confirmed this week it will begin processing immigrant visas, with a priority placed on permits to reunite Cubans with family in the U.S., and others like the diversity visa lottery.

The resumption comes amid the greatest migratory flight from Cuba in decades, which has placed pressure on the Biden administration to open more legal pathways to Cubans and start a dialogue with the Cuban government, despite a historically tense relationship.

They are anticipated to give out at least 20,000 visas a year, though it's just a drop in the bucket of the migratory tide, which is fueled by intensifying eco-



A classic American convertible car passes beside the United States embassy as Cuban flags fly at the Anti-Imperialist Tribune, a massive stage on the Malecon seaside promenade in Havana, Cuba, July 26, 2015.

Associated Press

nomic and political crises on the island.

In late December, U.S. authorities reported stopping Cubans 34,675 times along the Mexico border in November, up 21% from 28,848 times in October.

Month-to-month, that number has gradually risen. Cubans are now the second-

largest nationality after Mexicans appearing on the border, U.S. Customs and Border Protection data shows. The growing migration is due to a complex array of factors, including economic, energy and political crises, as well deep discontent among Cubans. While the vast majority of

Cuban migrants head to the U.S. via flights to Nicaragua and cross by land at the U.S. border with Mexico, thousands more have also taken a dangerous voyage by sea. They travel 90 miles to the Florida coast, often arriving in rickety, precariously constructed boats packed with migrants. □

Philippines seeks to cleanse police force of drug ties

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — The Philippines' interior secretary announced Wednesday he has asked all police generals and full colonels to submit their courtesy resignation to clean the ranks of ties to illegal drugs.

Around 300 officers are covered by the directive, which was recommended by the national police chief, who will also submit his courtesy resignation, Interior Secretary Benjamin Abalos Jr. said in a news conference.

"It appears that there is a big problem in our police force. It appears there are generals and colonels involved in drugs," he said. "We need to clean our ranks. We need the trust of the people."

More than a dozen police officers were arrested or relieved from their posts and put under investigation last

year for their involvement or suspected involvement in the drug trade. Abalos cited a recent case of law enforcers selling drugs in their office. The Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency was also subject to raids, arrests and dismissals in recent months.

Former President Rodrigo Duterte has earned international condemnation for his lethal war on drugs, which according to police data left over 6,200 suspects dead.

Human rights groups have cited higher death tolls and accused some police officers of fabricating evidence to make it appear that victims violently resisted arrest.

In November, Philippine National Police Chief Rodolfo Azurin Jr. said he directed law enforcers to minimize killings of people

engaged in drug activities. Abalos said it's difficult to fight a war against illegal drugs if supposed allies could shoot your back, and the resignations aim to prevent erring officers from covering their tracks or filing trumped-up charges.

A committee will be formed to review the records of police officials to determine if they are involved in the illegal drug trade, he said, adding that those who are not involved have nothing to worry about. □



In this photo provided by the Department of Interior and Local Government Photo, Interior Secretary Benjamin Abalos Jr. speaks during a news conference in Quezon City, Philippines Wednesday, Jan. 4, 2023.

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France's African ex-soldiers win last battle - over pensions

By JOHN LEICESTER

Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Some of the last survivors in France from a colonial-era infantry corps that recruited tens of thousands of African soldiers to fight in French wars around the world will be able to live out their final days with family members back in Africa after a French government U-turn on their pension rights.

The decision to make claiming their pensions easier follows a years-long campaign on behalf of the "tirailleurs Sénégalaïs," who were recruited to fight from Senegal and other former French colonies in sub-Saharan Africa.

It also coincides with the cinema release in France of a movie highlighting the sacrifices made by African soldiers on bloody French battlefields in World War I. "Tirailleurs" features actor Omar Sy, a star of the "Jurassic World" franchise.

To be eligible for their French pensions, veterans from the infantry corps founded in 1857 and disbanded a century later had to spend at least six months of the year living in



A French officer speaks to a Senegalese French Colonial soldier who has joined the Allies in North Africa under Gen. Henri Giraud on Dec. 28, 1942.

France.

That rule separated ageing former combatants from their families in Africa and some died alone, away from loved ones, says Aïssata Seck, who campaigns for them. Her grandfather was also a "tirailleur."

"It was extremely painful for the families and for us," Seck said in a telephone interview Wednesday with The Associated Press. "They live for the most part in extremely different circum-

stances in France, away from their families."

In all, 37 of the former tirailleurs most of them recruited to fight from Senegal, as well as Mali, Mauritania and Guinea are known to live in France, says Seck. The youngest of them is aged 90, and a dozen live in separate rooms in a home in the Paris suburb of Bondy, where Seck serves as an elected official. They served as tirailleurs during wars for independence in

Vietnam and Algeria, she said.

"They are gradually disappearing, because of their great age," she said in the AP interview.

Many tens of thousands of African recruits served in tirailleur regiments, in colonial wars, in both World Wars, and in France's Vietnam and Algeria wars before being disbanded in the early 1960s.

The pension decision concerns only 22 of the for-

Associated Press

mer soldiers who collect a 950-euro monthly payment (US\$1,000), the government's Solidarity Ministry told The AP.

They'll no longer have to spend six months of the year in France to be eligible and will continue receiving their pension payments even if they move away permanently, the ministry said.

The decision, applying a "principal of tolerance" for the veterans, will be formalized in a government letter to be published in coming days, the ministry said.

"After long years of fighting, we have finally won," Seck tweeted. "The former tirailleurs are going to be able to see out their lives in their countries of origin."

In Senegal, the head of the National Office for Veterans and Victims of War said the decision was overdue.

"For a long time veterans have asked to return with their pensions but were not successful. This decision will relieve them. These veterans live alone in their homes, they are not accompanied, they live in extremely difficult conditions," said the official, Capt. Ngor Sarr. □

Christian graves desecrated in historic Jerusalem cemetery

By ISABEL DEBRE

Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — More than 30 graves at a historic Christian cemetery in Jerusalem were found toppled and vandalized, the diocese said Wednesday, jolting the Christian minority in the contested city.

Israel's Foreign Ministry called the attack an "immoral act" and "an affront to religion." Jerusalem's Anglican Archbishop Hosam Naoum called it a "clear hate crime." The British consulate said it was just the latest in a string of assaults on the Christian community in the holy city of Jerusalem.

Police officers were sent to the Protestant Cemetery on Jerusalem's Mount Zion to investigate the profanation. Mount Zion, associated in Christian tradition



Hosam Naoum, a Palestinian Anglican bishop, pauses where vandals desecrated more than 30 graves at a historic Protestant Cemetery on Jerusalem's Mount Zion in Jerusalem, Wednesday, Jan. 4, 2023.

Associated Press

with the site of the Last Supper that Jesus shared with his disciples the night before his crucifixion, is also sacred to Jews and Muslims and has been at the center of competing religious claims throughout the de-

cadeslong Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Widely shared security camera footage on Sunday showed two young men both wearing a Jewish skullcap and tzitzit, the knotted ritual fringes worn by observant Jews

breaking into the cemetery, knocking over stone crosses and smashing and stomping on tombstones, leaving a trail of debris and broken headstones.

Among the destroyed tombs was one containing a 19th century bust of Samuel Gobat, the second Protestant Bishop in Jerusalem who died in 1879, the Episcopal diocese said. The graves of three Palestinian police officers who died during the British mandate years were also vandalized. The diocese cautioned that the desecration of the cemetery should be seen as an ominous warning about "hatred against Christians."

"Many stone crosses were the targets of the vandals, clearly indicating that these criminal acts were motivated by religious big-

otry," it said, urging authorities to redouble efforts to find the perpetrators.

The Protestant Cemetery on the venerated Mount Zion just outside Jerusalem's Old City walls was established in 1848 and was part of territory that Israel seized in the 1967 Mideast war. The cemetery houses the graves of dozens of Palestinian police officers killed during the First and Second World Wars as well as Christian leaders who died in the 19th and 20th centuries. Jewish extremists have defaced church property on Mount Zion in the past years. Jews consider Mount Zion the traditional burial place of the biblical King David and some ultra-Orthodox and nationalist activists have opposed Christian prayer rights at the site. □

Aruba's 69th Carnival to begin this Saturday

ORANJESTAD – A few weeks ago, the foundation in charge of Aruba's Carnival, SMAC began its meetings to organize Aruba's 69th Carnival. This week they announced that all stakeholders are organizing for the torch parade which will take place on the 7th of January.

Our island is known for its white-sanded beaches and perfect climate, but there is one time in the year that Aruba draws thousands of visitors: carnival. The visitor's experience during carnival season will be amazing. Sensational musical events, queen elections and different parades are all part of this spectacular phenomenon.

Carnival is part of Aruba's history and cultural heritage; actually it is the largest cultural festival on the island. For the islanders it is a way to express their creativity and break away from the daily buzz of life: Dancing to the rhythm of local music while enjoying the ambiance of the public are some of the ingredients of this festival.



Oranjestad and San Nicolas are the stages for this display of unique designed costumes, amazing ambience and upbeat, local music. The festival is for everybody accessible and safe to visit. Behind the screens there is an enormous organization that makes sure that this festival runs smoothly. The police, inspection department, Red Cross volunteers, garbage service and many others work day and night to make sure that carnival is a success. All the trailers are being carefully inspected before they are allowed to participate as well as the vehicles that pull them. After each parade the streets are being cleaned and road blocks are being taken away so next day normal traffic flow occurs. The several organizations and institutions work together with the official carnival organization SMAC.

This year's calendar indicates the following:

January 8: Prins and Pancho election;
January 13: Children and Youth Queen election;
January 14: Carnival Queen and Mrs. Carnival election;
January 22: LGBTQ elections Brunch with a steelpan and drums showdown;
January 27: Caiso Monarch final;
January 28: Soca final;
January 29: Balloons parade;
February 3: Hebbe Hebbe;
February 4: Children's Parade in North; Grand Tumba Contest;
February 5: Transfer and Command; Big Children Parade in Oranjestad;
February 8: Sunset Parade;
February 10: Jouve City;
February 11: Jouvert Morning and Lighting Parade;



February 12: Big Children Parade in San Nicolas; Burning of the Momito;
February 16: Lighting Parade;
February 17: Carnival is Life (Jump In);
February 18: Big Parade in San Nicolas;
February 19: Big Parade in Oranjestad and Burning of Momo.

The official sequence for the groups during the torch parade will be as follows:

Empire Carnival Group
TOB Carnival Group
Infinity Carnival Group
Royal Carnival Group
Los Laga Bai Carnival Group
Champagne Carnival Group. □



Aruba National Park Foundation: Aruba's nature is a winner!

ORANJESTAD – Aruba National Park Foundation is starting the New Year with some great news.

"We are thrilled to share that Parke Nacional Arikok is one of the winners in the 2023 USA TODAY 10Best Readers' Choice Travel Awards contest for Best Caribbean Attraction", the park posted on their social media account. "We're honored to be recognized

among so many different attraction and experiences from across the Caribbean and we couldn't be more grateful to have made it to the TOP 10! We want to say THANK YOU to everyone who voted for us! We couldn't do it without you and nature can't do it without you."

Aruba's Arikok National Park peaked at number 2 on the list of 10 Best Carib-



bean Attractions, behind Belmont Estate in Grenada. According to 10Best, "a panel of experts partnered with 10Best editors to pick the initial nominees, and the top 10 winners were determined by popular vote."

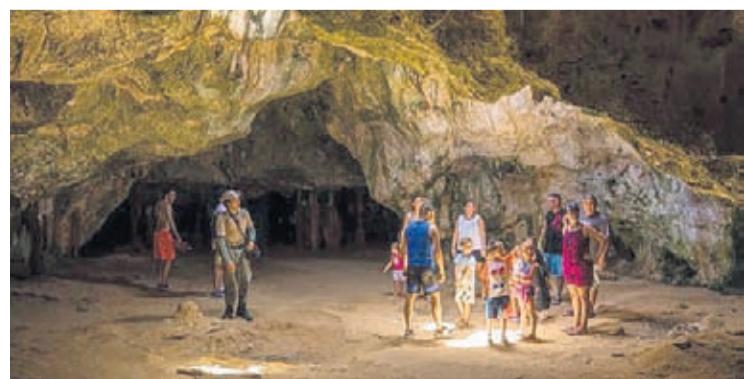
"Covering 20 percent of the island of Aruba, Arikok National Park features cacti-covered hills and a

dramatic coastline. Visitors to the park can climb into ruins of an old gold mine, search for Arawak petroglyphs or go snorkeling in a natural pool", according to 10Best.

The list also includes sister islands in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Curacao (Shete Boka National Park

at number four) and Sint Maarten (St. Maarten 12 Metre Regatta at number 3).

"Thank you for helping us protect, preserve and restore nature in Aruba for generations to come," Arikok National Park concluded. □



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Papillon: the butterfly effect of magnificent food



PALM BEACH — Do you remember the film "Papillon" starring Steve McQueen? Papillon restaurant is the island's example where 'life imitates art.' The décor, especially the restrooms, was inspired by the movie. For more than a decade this restaurant has built a reputation with the fusion of classic French cuisine, Dutch and Caribbean flavors. Welcome in the world of wonders where ambiance, taste and service come together and you feel you are being welcomed in the home of the owner and her team.

"We find it really important that our guests have fun; can relax while listening to live music while their taste buds are being tickled by France, The Netherlands and the Caribbean. We offer a unique fusion of dishes and a night not to forget," says owner Tina. She points out that all Covid-protocol is in place here, they are very keen on hygiene and offer outside dining on a cozy, elegant terrace with social distancing in place and right on the high-rise strip.



Fresh oysters, caviar and wild boar

You are on vacation, life is to enjoy! If you want something special, a different flow than the usual then Papillon is the place to go. Foodies are in heaven here with classic French dishes such as Foie Gras, Frog Legs, fresh Oysters coming in on a weekly basis from Holland, Escargots, Dover Sole à la Meunière flown in from Europe and filleted at the table, Duck Breast seared on the skin, roasted and braised Lamb in Balashi beer and slow braised Wild Boar Shank. Do not leave without trying the exclusive recommendation: Caviar! All of this combined with an extensive wine list from around the world makes Papillon a must-do on your Aruban vacation.

Let the music play!

We will give you another reason to visit: on Monday's and Friday's the famous Marisela who enchants you with her acoustic performance accompanied by percussion only; on Thursday's and Saturday's you can enjoy the tunes of live sax player Jairo and on Sunday's and Tuesday's Jose Herrera will enchant



you with his keyboard talent. The musicians interact with the guests, requests can be send in, the live tunes definitely add to the experience.

Vegetarian vibes present

Impressive vegetarian/vegan dishes are set up especially for the guests by the chef and Meredith from Vegan Aruba. "We offer vegan choices that are really good and tasty. Our daily soup is always vegan too." What are you waiting for, make sure to pay a visit to this elegant yet laid-back restaurant while on Aruba. You are most welcome!

Papillon Restaurant is located at The Village across the Hilton Aruba Caribbean Resort & Casino and within walking distance of all other major hotels.

Make your reservation today at:

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Organ concerto for adults and children Gabriel Dessauer



Please join us Monday January 30, 4 PM for a special concert in our wonderful Church! One hour of wonderful Baroque and Romantic Organ Music, played by the famous German organist and conductor Gabriel Dessauer on the famous Flentrop Organ.

Beautiful works of Bach, Mozart, Liszt (B-A-C-H), Bédard and Widor will be played. The program is especially directed towards children. Parents: bring your kids!

Gabriel Dessauer, organist and director

Gabriel Dessauer (1955) is concert organist, cantor and an academic. He was responsible for the church music at St. Bonifatius, a church in Wiesbaden, from 1981 to 2021. He also conducted the Choir of St. Bonifatius until 2018. Gabriel is an internationally known organ recitalist. He was an organ teacher at the faculty of the Music Conservatory of Mainz. In 1985,

he founded the German-English project choir, the Reger-Choir. He has lectured at international conferences, especially about the music of the composer Max Reger.

Dessauer has given recitals in Europe and the U.S.: at the Washington National Cathedral and at St. Patrick's Cathedral, New York. He played the Kotzschmar organ in the Merrill Auditorium in Portland, Maine, and in the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles. In 2004, he lectured at the National Convention of the American Guild of Organists in Los Angeles on the choral music of Max Reger. In 2005, Dessauer played at the Spreckels Organ Pavilion in San Diego. In 2010, he gave a re-

cital at St. Ignatius Loyola, New York.

Since 1992, Dessauer has conducted events for the Rheingau Music Festival called the Orgeltour (organ tour), visiting historic organs in the region; from Rheingau to the cathedrals of Worms, Speyer, Würzburg and Fulda.

Every year on 3 October, German Unity Day, Dessauer has conducted works such as Mendelssohn's Elias, Ein deutsches Requiem of Brahms, and Verdi's Messa da Requiem.

In 2014, Dessauer toured the US, playing concerts at the Washington National Cathedral, at St. Mary's Cathedral in San Francisco, California, and at the Salt Lake Tabernacle organ in

Salt Lake City.

In November 2015 Dessauer was the organist for a sing-along organized by the Diocese of Limburg in St. Bonifatius. A choir of 150 volunteers studied Gabriel Fauré's Requiem and performed it as part of the Wiesbadener Bachwochen festival.

Entrance fee is for the restauration of the church roof. This church is a place, open for prayer and worship. Especially a place of worship for our visiting guests, tourists and inhabitants.

We are honored to receive Gabriel Dessauer and have him give a beautiful concert in beautiful Oranjestad. □



Today Is Going To Be A Good Day

Here's why: Aruba Today collected some things to do BEYOND the beach. Yes, we know. Aruba, located 15 miles north of Venezuela in the warm waters of the southern Caribbean, is home to beautiful white-sand beaches, 82-degree days, and thus ideal for the perfect beach day. But we are also blessed with some of the warmest people in the world and our island is 19.6 miles long and 6 miles across, with a total area of 70 square miles. Bit more to discover than the white stretch on the coastline we say. Let's mention some of these hidden gems.



Nature Calls

The Arikok National park is worth the ride. We love the hikes that are guided by the park's rangers whose job is to maintain trails and protect natural resources. The flora and fauna are beautiful and the historical sites tell you about the island's indigenous roots. The guided tours are even free of charge. If you are not up to walking, you can drive through the park, one way or another this park is a great place to spend an entire day. Cruising through the landscape you end up at some of the most stunning beaches like Dos Playa or Daimara Beach. In Total the park consists of 7907 acres protected nature with a richness of animals living in it. The Aruban whip-

tail lizard (cododo), Aruban cat eye snake (santanero) and endangered rattle snake (cascabel) are just some of them, you can also admire these close in the park's Visitors' Center. For more information, visit the website www.arubanationalpark.org

The Lighthouse

No, you would not think of this as a hidden gem. The California Lighthouse is actually one of the most known highlights in Aruba and many repeated guests most probably took the ride uphill already. But, there is a significant change to this tower. Since September 2016 you can climb the top. In 2015 Stichting Monumentenfonds started the

restoration of the California Lighthouse. The project finished in September 2016 and the Lighthouse is now open for visitors to enjoy the beautiful view from the top. The construction of the California Lighthouse started in 1915. The name 'California' came from a vessel of the West India Company and Pacific Steamship Co. called 'California' that shipwrecked in the area in 1891. Therefore they came up with the idea of building a lighthouse that could indicate the island's eastern tip to ships with its light. www.arubalighthouse.com will give you more information.

Kayak in the Mangroves

Mangel Halto at Savaneta is definitely a place not to miss out on. The beautiful beach with the natural mangroves is simply a beauty, but if you are into a more active way to enjoy the nature: take a kayak. While you are doing some workout -as it might get a little windy and rough-, you will see the island from a different perspective. You can even make a stop to do some snorkeling at the reef. It's fun, it's healthy and for sure something else. There are several companies that offer kayak tours, we had good experience with The Shack Kayak Tours Aruba, find them on Facebook.□



Aruba welcomed the first baby of the year 2023: Marvick Mauricio Irausquin

ORANJESTAD – Exactly at 3:30pm the first baby of the year 2023 was born at the Horacio Oduber Hospital (HOH). A moment of happiness and celebration for Aruba and the team at HOH on the first day of January 2023.

It is a tradition for Aruba to be pending to know who will be the first baby for the New Year, and for 2023 it is a baby boy. From the stroke of midnight, the entire personnel of the department of Maternity were on alert, but no mothers entered the hospital until after noon on the 1st of January 2023. It was exactly at 3:30pm that the baby of the year,

Marvick Mauricio Irausquin, was welcomed.

With happiness, his mother Yoryina Brown and father Marvin Irausquin held their baby for the first time. This is their first child, and they named him Marvick Mauricio. Baby Marvick was born after gynecologist Dr. Daphne Moreta performed a C-section in the operation room. Afterwards, pediatrician Dr. Eric Arends did the checkup, and now mom and dad have their cute baby in their arms. Baby Marvick weighed 3020 gram and has a length of 50cm.

Mom and dad are said to

be extremely happy that baby Marvick is healthy, and thank Dr. Moreta, Dr. Arends and the entire team of the operation room and the department of maternity at the HOH for guiding the entire process and giving them the necessary support.

They thank Frasa Trading, Compra Trading and Swift Distributions for the different gifts and donations made to the baby of the year 2023.

Up until late in the afternoon, no other babies were born, so it was a calm day at the maternity department. □



Aruba movie, Blackout winner at NIIFF 2022

ORANJESTAD – The movie by local producer Angel Soto, Blackout, closed the year 2022 with another prestigious award.

During the Northeast International India Film Festival (NIIFF) 2022, the movie Blackout won the Best Feature Film award in 2022.

The movie had its opening in September 2022. The story is about a reporter, Juancho, who tries to alert local authorities that Aruba was about to be attacked by the Germans. No one believed him.

NIIFF Best Feature Film award was the second award that Blackout has received. In India, Blackout also won the Best International Film award during the International Lake City Film Festival in 2022.

Aruba can be proud of the actors, producer and everyone who worked to make Blackout possible. Aruba might be small in size, but it is great in talent.

Aruban minister of Sport present at the American Baseball Coaches Association congress

ORANJESTAD – Yesterday afternoon, Aruban minister of Sport, Mr. Endy Croes departed for a work trip to Nashville, Tennessee for a big congress of the American Baseball Coaches Association. ABCA is the largest organization of amateur baseball coaches in the world, with more than 13,000 members.

During the first week of January, ABCA is organizing an exhibition and tradeshow in the discipline of baseball. During the tradeshow there will be more than 300 baseball companies showcasing their products. It is a great opportunity for Aruba to create contacts

with these companies that have different materials that can be purchased in the future for baseball in Aruba. It will also be a good opportunity to get a closer view of the newest products that have recently been launched, according to a government press release.

During the exhibition there will be a clinic in which there will be demonstrations of products and trainings from the ABCA partners. The minister will meet with different stakeholders during the congress. The minister indicated that in the coming days he will be updating on his work visit to the United States. □



CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS 43 Fairy

1 Tag sale tale
warning monster

5 Arrival 44 Grimm

11 Solitary boy

12 Dorm sharer

13 Rescue

14 Properly pitched

15 News-paper feature

17 Stephen of "The Crying Game"

18 Deceive

22 Jitterbug's cousin

24 Supply with funds

25 Casino card

26 Hot blood

27 Exams

30 Fork features

32 Car of the '50s

33 Ball

34 Attenda-nce figures

38 Crack, in a way

41 Gooey cheese

42 Pumpkin color



Yesterday's answer

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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'3					14					
'5				16	.					
'7			17			18		19	20	21
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25						26				
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38	39	40		35			36	37		
42					41					
44					43					

1-5

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

1-5 CRYPTOQUOTE

Q N O L U G H E Q G W U R X Q L F U

B U C W U R C X U R I L G C W . Q N O

H E Q G ' N B U C Y R L X E .

— U C N U L H Z Y Y Z N

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: WINTER, A LINGERING SEASON, IS A TIME TO GATHER GOLDEN MOMENTS. EMBARK UPON A SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY, AND ENJOY EVERY IDLE HOUR. — JOHN BOSWELL

Millennial Money: Is meal kit delivery still worth the cost?

By DALIA RAMIREZ of Nerd-Wallet

Meal kit subscriptions boomed in popularity in 2020, when more people were staying home and cooking than going out to eat during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Companies like HelloFresh, Blue Apron and EveryPlate catered to customers looking for healthy meals with more variety, made with pre-portioned ingredients shipped to their door.

But now that restaurants and supermarkets are back to business as usual, some meal kit users are wondering if their subscription is still worth the cost especially after the promotional offers are gone. Meal kit companies are known to offer dramatic discounts on their plans for new customers, including dozens of free meals, or over 50% off the full price for first-time subscribers. Excluding promotions, meals generally run between \$6 to \$12 per serving, putting the cost on par with some takeout options. And with most meal kit subscriptions covering just four to six meals a week, customers still need to grocery shop for their other two daily meals.

Whether the meal kits are worth the cost depends on what's important to you and what you would be spending otherwise on food. Here are some factors to consider when you're deciding whether to start or continue a meal kit subscription.

HOW MUCH WOULD YOU OTHERWISE SPEND ON FOOD?

For some customers, the most important factor in



Blue Apron launches a Fireside Feast Box featuring French-inspired recipes designed for cozy winter nights spent indoors.

Associated Press

deciding whether to use a meal kit is the price. A subscription may cost more or less than you would typically spend on ingredients, depending on your budget for groceries and dining out, and household size.

"The intro offer pricing was equivalent to my usual weekly grocery budget, but a full-price box wasn't," says Nadia Russell, a health care analyst. She enjoyed the convenience and variety her subscription offered, but she canceled after the promotional period due to the cost increase.

"I could spend the same amount at the grocery store for a week's worth of groceries," says Emily Bird, an administrator for a music distribution company, about the cost of a weekly meal kit package. She, too, took advantage of a popular meal kit's promotional offer but chose to cancel the subscription after the first few weeks.

But if you'd otherwise be purchasing takeout or going to a restaurant, a meal

kit could be a cheaper option. It could also be a more appealing option for a larger household: Most services offer a discount for a higher number of servings.

"It was definitely cheaper than buying groceries at the grocery store every week," she says, noting that she didn't cancel for cost-related reasons.

HOW MUCH ARE YOU WILLING TO PAY FOR CONVENIENCE?

Meal kits can be cost-effective in less concrete ways.

They reduce the time and energy needed to plan meals and shop for groceries, which can hold you back from getting creative in the kitchen.

"I like to cook and try new recipes," says Christina McNichol, a full-time nanny. "It's way more expensive to try to make elaborate recipes when you have to buy all the ingredients separately; with a meal kit, I could pick my meals ahead of time and get the exact amount I needed."

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Editor

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 Acc.#23951903
 RBC Royal Bank Acc.#1330772

Editors

Pilar Flores
 Richard Brooks
 Angenette Figuereo

Sales

Mark Gomes
 Sulaika Croes

Classifieds

classified@cspnv.com

Distribution and Collection

accounting@bondia.com

Social / Website

Juan Luis Pinto

Weststraat 22
 T: 582-7800
 E: news@arubatoday.com
 W: www.arubatoday.com
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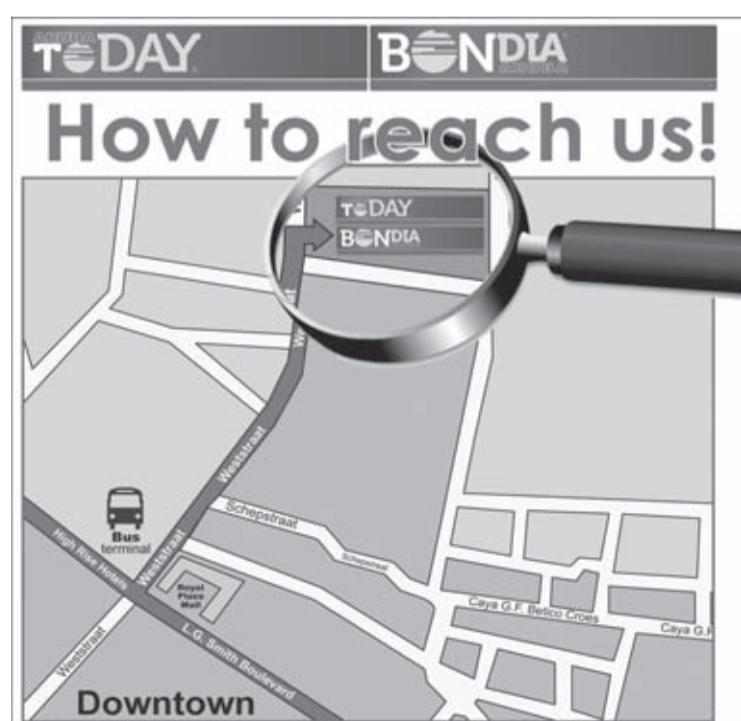
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Sheriff: No foul play in 'Avengers' star snow tractor injury

By SCOTT SONNER

Associated Press

RENO, Nev. (AP) — The serious injuries actor Jeremy Renner suffered while using a snow tractor to free a snowbound motorist on a private mountain road near Lake Tahoe appear to be the result of a "tragic accident," the sheriff in Reno said Tuesday.

The 51-year-old "Avengers" star was seriously hurt when he was run over by his own snowcat after using it to free a vehicle driven by a family member that became stuck in 3 feet (0.9 meters) of fresh mountain snow on New Year's Day, Washoe County Sheriff Darin Balaam said.

An investigation is continuing but there were no signs of foul play or any indication Renner was impaired at the time of the Sunday morning incident, Balaam told reporters.

"At this point in the investigation ... we believe this is a tragic accident," the sheriff said. "He was being a great neighbor and he was plowing those roads for his neighbors."

The accident left Renner in critical but stable condition with chest and orthopedic injuries, according to a publicist and sheriff's officials who said Renner was



Jeremy Renner poses for photographers upon arrival at the UK Fan Screening of the film "Hawkeye," in London, Thursday, Nov. 11, 2021.

Associated Press

floated by medical helicopter about 25 miles (40 kilometers) to a Reno hospital. About the same time reporters were gathering with Balaam on Tuesday, Renner posted an Instagram photo of himself in a hospital bed and a message, missing an apostrophe.

"Thank you all for your kind words," it said. "I'm too messed up now to type. But I send love to you all."

Balaam said Renner had used his Pistenbully snow groomer, a 7-ton vehicle

he owns, to tow another personal vehicle that had become snowbound on a private road he shares with neighbors.

"After successfully towing his personal vehicle from its stuck location, Mr. Renner got out of his (snowcat) to speak to his family member," Balaam said. "The Pistenbully started to roll. In an effort to stop (it), Mr. Renner attempts to climb back into the driver's seat. It's at this point that Mr. Renner is run over."

The sheriff said the snowcat was impounded and is being examined by investigators "for any mechanical failure and why it started to roll."

"He was helping someone stranded in the snow," Reno Mayor Hillary Schieve told the Reno Gazette-Journal Monday night. She said she and the actor are friends and that she was called about the accident shortly after it happened near the Mt. Rose Highway that connects Reno to Lake Tahoe.

"He is always helping others," the mayor told the newspaper.

Balaam said Tuesday that it took first responders from Reno more than 30 minutes to traverse the several miles of snowy road to reach Renner on the private road off the highway.

A publicist for Renner said in a statement Monday that he suffered blunt chest trauma and orthopedic injuries and remained in critical but stable condition in intensive care unit following surgery at a Reno hospital. Renner plays Hawkeye, a sharp-shooting member of the superhero Avengers squad in Marvel's sprawling movie and television universe. Balaam said the two-time acting Oscar nominee has become an honorary deputy sheriff in Reno through his participation in the county's "Shop with the Sheriff" program that raises money for children to shop for Christmas gifts.

"Throughout the community he has been very generous," the sheriff said.

Renner scored back-to-back Oscar nominations for "The Hurt Locker" and "The Town." His portrayal of a bomb disposal specialist in Iraq in 2009's "The Hurt Locker" helped turn him into a household name. □

'Romeo & Juliet' stars sue over 1968 film's teen nude scene

By ANDREW DALTON

AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The two stars of 1968's "Romeo

and Juliet" sued Paramount Pictures for more than \$500 million on Tuesday over a nude scene in the film shot



Olivia Hussey and Leonard Whiting, who are playing the title roles in Franco Zeffirelli's "Romeo and Juliet," place flowers on the "Tomba di Giulietta," or the Tomb of Juliet, in Verona, northern Italy, on Oct. 22, 1968.

Associated Press

when they were teens.

Olivia Hussey, then 15 and now 71, and Leonard Whiting, then 16 now 72, filed the suit in Los Angeles County Superior Court alleging sexual abuse, sexual harassment and fraud. Director Franco Zeffirelli, who died in 2019, initially told the two that they would wear flesh-colored undergarments in the bedroom scene that comes late in the movie and was shot on the final days of filming, the suit alleges.

But on the morning of the shoot, Zeffirelli told Whiting, who played Romeo, and Hussey, who played Juliet, that they would wear only body makeup, while still assuring them the camera

would be positioned in a way that would not show nudity, according to the suit.

Yet they were filmed in the nude without their knowledge, in violation of California and federal laws against indecency and the exploitation of children, the suit says.

Zeffirelli told them they must act in the nude "or the Picture would fail" and their careers would be hurt, the suit said. The actors "believed they had no choice but to act in the nude in body makeup as demanded." Whiting's bare buttocks and Hussey's bare breasts are briefly shown during the scene.

The film, and its theme

song, were major hits at the time, and has been shown to generations of high school students studying the Shakespeare play since.

The court filing says the Hussey and Whiting have suffered emotional damage and mental anguish for decades, and that each had careers that did not reflect the success of the movie.

It says given that suffering and the revenue brought in by the film since its release, the actors are entitled to damages of more than \$500 million.

An email seeking comment from representatives of Paramount was not immediately returned. □

3 NFL teams look for rare trip from 2-6 start to playoffs

By JOSH DUBOW
AP Pro Football Writer

Falling into a 2-6 hole near the midpoint of a season is usually a recipe to look to the future for NFL teams, with only two teams ever climbing out of that hole to reach the postseason.

Headed into Week 18 of this season, three teams that lost six of their first eight games remain in the playoff hunt.

Jacksonville can clinch the AFC South with a victory over Tennessee or it could sneak in as a wild-card team with a loss and lots of help.

Detroit and Pittsburgh have more complicated paths, with the Lions needing a win and a Seattle loss to clinch the seventh seed in the NFC and the Steelers needing a win plus losses by Miami and New England to clinch the final wild-card spot in the AFC.

The addition of an extra playoff team in 2020 and a 17th game in 2021 made climbing out of a hole a bit easier than in the past, but it still is rather remarkable.

Before this season, 186 teams in the Super Bowl era started a season 2-6, with only Cincinnati in 1970 and Washington in 2020 making it to the postseason.

The Jaguars have gone on quite a roller-coaster ride, having lost five straight from Weeks 4-8 and then win-



Pittsburgh Steelers safety Damontae Kazee (23) and linebacker Robert Spillane (41) celebrate an interception by safety Minkah Fitzpatrick, center, against the Baltimore Ravens in an NFL football game in Baltimore, Fla., Sunday, Jan. 1, 2023.

ning the last four games. A victory Saturday night against Tennessee would make Jacksonville the fifth team to get to the playoffs in a season with a both a winning and losing streak of at least five games. The last team to do it was Kansas City in 2015.

The Titans can also join that group win a win, having won five straight early in the season and then losing the last six games.

The only teams to make the playoffs in a season with a six-game losing streak are the 2020 Bears, the 2014 Panthers and the 1970 Ben-

gals.

PLAYOFF NEWCOMERS

The Giants clinched their first playoff berth since 2016, assuring this will be the 33rd straight season with at least four new playoff teams.

New York joins Baltimore, the Los Angeles Chargers and Minnesota as teams that made the postseason a year after missing it. The last time there were fewer than four new playoff teams in a season was in 1989 when only three teams did it.

There's still a chance for three more teams to join the list, with Jacksonville

having a shot at the AFC South or wild-card spots, Miami in contention for an AFC wild-card spot and Detroit and Seattle in the running for the seventh seed in the NFC.

SACK PARTY

The Philadelphia Eagles are closing in on the NFL's single-season sacks record. The Eagles have recorded 68 sacks so far this season for the fourth-best total ever and can pass the record of 72 set by the 1984 Bears with five more in Week 18. Philadelphia has had at least six sacks in the past five games for the longest

Associated Press

streak by any team in the Super Bowl era.

The Eagles have spread out the sacks, with Haason Reddick leading the way with 16, followed by 11 each for Josh Sweat, Javon Hargrave and Brandon Graham. This is the first time since individual sacks became an official stat in 1982 that a team had four players reach double figures in the same season.

STREAKING

A few impressive streaks got extended in Week 17. Tampa Bay's Mike Evans had 207 yards receiving to top the 1,000-yard mark for the ninth straight season. Evans is the first player to do that in his first nine seasons and joined Hall of Famers Jerry Rice (11 straight) and Tim Brown (9 straight) as the only players to do it at any point in their careers.

Kansas City's Jerick McKinnon had a TD catch for the fifth straight game, becoming the first running back to do that since the merger.

New Orleans defensive end Cameron Jordan had three sacks to give him 8 1/2 on the season, marking the 11th straight year he has had at least seven. The only players to do that since sacks became an official stat in 1982 are Reggie White (14 straight), Chris Doleman (13), John Randle (12), Derrick Thomas (11) and Robert Mathis (11). □

Hudson interim U.S. men's soccer coach during Berhalter probe

By RONALD BLUM
AP Sports Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Anthony Hudson will coach the United States men's soccer

team rather than Gregg Berhalter ahead of the first two matches of the cycle leading to the 2026 World Cup.



United States head coach Gregg Berhalter follows the game during the World Cup group B soccer match between England and The United States, at the Al Bayt Stadium in Al Khor, Qatar, Friday, Nov. 25, 2022.

Associated Press

The U.S. Soccer Federation announced Tuesday it was investigating Berhalter for a 1991 domestic violence incident involving the woman who became his wife. Hudson will lead the team ahead of exhibitions against Serbia on Jan. 25 at Los Angeles and Colombia three days later at Carson, California. USSF sporting director Earnie Stewart said Wednesday. Hudson, 41, was hired as coach of the U.S. under-20 team in January 2020, and a year later became an assistant coach to Berhalter. The USSF said its assessment of the 2018-22 cycle and the investigation of

Berhalter are ongoing. The federation said Tuesday it learned of the allegation against Berhalter on Dec. 11 and hired the law firm Alston & Bird to investigate. "Through this process, U.S. Soccer has learned about potential inappropriate behavior towards multiple members of our staff by individuals outside of our organization," the USSF said.

Berhalter said Tuesday a person contacted the USSF "saying that they had information about me that would 'take me down.' He also said in his statement that his 1991 behavior 'shameful' and that he was 'looking forward

to continuing my conversations with U.S. Soccer about the future." Hudson's staff will include U.S. assistant coach B.J. Callaghan and current U.S. under-20 coach Mikey Varas. Luchi Gonzalez, the other American assistant coach, agreed last summer to become coach of MLS's San Jose Earthquakes following the World Cup.

Hudson also has coached fifth-tier Newport in England in 2011, Bahrain's national team in 2013 and 2014, New Zealand's national team from 2014-17 and Major League Soccer's Colorado Rapids from 2017-19. □

Shiffrin takes slalom to move within 1 win of Vonn's record

ZAGREB, Croatia (AP) — Mikaela Shiffrin felt "really excited" Wednesday after winning the first women's World Cup race of 2023. And it wasn't because she had just moved within one victory of Lindsey Vonn's record.

"I skied better than I probably ever have," Shiffrin said. The defending overall champion dealt best with difficult course conditions to dominate a floodlit slalom and raise her career tally to 81 World Cup wins. She could match the best mark Thursday at another slalom on the same course. American standout Vonn set the women's record of 82 before retiring in 2019. The overall best mark is 86, from Swedish great Ingemar Stenmark.



United States' Mikaela Shiffrin reacts after winning an alpine ski, women's World Cup slalom race, in Zagreb, Croatia, Wednesday, Jan. 4, 2023.

"I'm happy, I'm incredibly happy. I mean, I had so much fun skiing today and it was really my best skiing both runs today," said Shiffrin, who beat runner-up Petra Vlhová by 0.76 sec-

onds, with the rest of the field finishing more than 1.20 off the pace. The former overall champion of Slovakia had won the race on the outskirts of the Croatian capital the past

three seasons. Vlhová's rise to the top has motivated Shiffrin.

"I feel like I would not be here tonight with skiing like that, if it wasn't for Petra pushing the limits in the last three years. She's been so strong and it has encouraged me to keep working harder and harder and harder," Shiffrin said.

"Nothing less than the best is going to work. I was taking all the risk I needed and made it on the finish and that's just an amazing feeling when it's good enough."

Shiffrin certainly has been more than just good enough in recent weeks. The four-time overall champion stretched her winning streak to five races, which included three different

events: super-G, giant slalom, and slalom.

Only two female racers have won more races in succession: Swiss skier Vreni Schneider won eight in 1988-89 and Germany's Katja Seizinger won six in 1997.

Earlier, Shiffrin won back-to-back slaloms in Finland to start the 2022-23 season. On Wednesday, Shiffrin stood up to the challenge to defend her first-run lead as the last starter on the deteriorating Crveni Spust course.

While no racers remained without mistakes, Shiffrin never got in real trouble in her final run. She even won time on Vlhová at every split and celebrated with both arms up after crossing the finish, followed by two fist pumps.

"That was the most exciting thing of the day, that I felt so good skiing when it's a bit softer. The victory is incredible, but I'm more happy with how I feel, it's just calm," Shiffrin said.

The American said she used new skis which she and her equipment supplier Atomic developed over the past two years. The new set-up is meant to give her a better control on softer courses that have been injected with water and salt like the one in Zagreb.

Shiffrin drew an unfavorable start number and began the opening run last among the top-seven ranked racers. But she did best to keep the line between the gates, despite being bounced around by ruts and waves in the rather soft snow surface after days with temperatures of 10 to 15 degrees Celsius (50-59 Fahrenheit).

"These kinds of conditions have been challenging for me, in the last two years especially. But tonight, it was just a really perfect combination of the equipment with my skiing," Shiffrin said.

"I'm just thankful when it goes well. In the last five races it went really well. So, now I am just on a groove and keep riding the wave until the wave is over." □

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